

Funny Work Stories: Hokey (2009)

Was it '88? or '87?

I think it was '87. Yes. Yes it was. I was not yet 18. I was working at a pizza place. (not the one where I thought a pineapple pizza only had one chunk of pineapple on it, because one chunk weighed the right amount for one topping on a large pizza, according to the scale, and the Diabolical Chart on the wall that I was told NEVER TO STRAY FROM NO MATTER WHAT, and once said pizza came out of the oven, it was promptly spotted by the angry little managerial woman operating the other end with the big spatula thing, scooped up, and thrown into trash, while I was informed: G-D- AMY, IF I HAVE TO THROW AWAY ONE MORE PIZZA BECAUSE OF YOU, YOU'RE FIRED...)

No, it was a different pizza place. I quit the other one on my own, no need to stand around much longer and wait to be fired. That woman hated me. On the first day, she walked up to me, grabbed the edge of my Rolling Stones concert shirt that I had paid good money for, shook her head and said, What makes you think you can dress like this up here? You have no sleeves.

No, I didn't have sleeves. But nobody told me otherwise. So again, it wasn't that pizza place. It was this one, where I was told to hokey.

It was my first day. I was nervous. I was already struggling with my usual mental block that quickly formed upon learning the new registers, so my mind was already compromised when he said it.

The manager. A married man whose young wife would come up, hauling her kids along, and sit down and eat with him each day. I always observed them. I wondered, is he making her do this? Or is he deep down embarrassed that she's here?

We never bothered my dad at work. We stayed in our world while he went to his.

Other families have been fascinating me for as long as I can remember.

But back to the hokey. The manager was leaving for the night, and told me, You did a good job today Amy. All I need you to do before leaving is hokey. See you in the morning.

I stood there, nodded and smiled.

I thought I knew what he meant. I assumed "hokey" was pizza-place language for "hurry", or "put a little spring in your step!"

Isn't that what it sounds like?

So I was proud of myself that night as I closed the shop with a few other people, the

kitchen guys did their thing and I did mine. I hokeyed really well. I got everything done quickly. I straightened the chairs, wiped down the tables, you name it, I at least looked at it.

I left that night thinking, I "hokeyed".

Well, as it turns out, "hokey" is not slang for anything. Come to find out, it's a real thing. A hokey is that little hand broom thing that looks like a vacuum that somebody forgot to finish building. I found all this out the next day when I got there. The first thing the manager said to me was, "Amy, do you remember what I asked you to do before leaving last night?" I said yes, and smiled.

I remember this conversation. I remember the look on his face when I stood there and smiled. His eyebrows went up and he looked half annoyed/half quizzical. He said, "Well.... why didn't you do it?"

I told him I did, and I did it well. I told him I hokeyed.

He looked down on the floor, in both directions, and all around. He told me that he could tell with his own eyes that I did not hokey.

I wondered how he knew whether or not I hurried as I was cleaning. And I began to wonder, how can this matter? This went on for a minute or two. A big misunderstanding began to form like storm clouds, like it always did, while I was on the clock somewhere.

I have a whole string of these types of things in my memory bank, believe me.

So we went back and forth, me stating that I did in fact hokey, and he thinking me to be a liar, as he could plainly see that his shop had not been hokeyed.

The frustration to this conversation mounted until the once pleasant manager shook his head and said to me, "AMY- COME WITH ME."

I followed him down the hallway and watched as he opened up a little closet door. He impatiently reached inside and grabbed a little gray pole and pulled it out. He slammed this contraption down in front of me. He said, "THIS" (making sweeping movements with it) ... "THIS IS A HOKEY. "

I was shocked. The clouds cleared, and I realized at once the misunderstanding. I began to laugh uncontrollably and had to cross my legs and hold my tummy so I wouldn't pee my pants.

The manager did not laugh. I was beet red and did not regain my composure for the rest of the day. Actually I ended up quitting the next day.

